

RECLOSABLE PACKAGE HAVING SLIDER DEVICE
AND TAMPER-EVIDENT STRUCTURE

5 Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(e) is claimed to provisional application serial number 60/179,031, filed on January 18, 2000, and entitled "Reclosable Package Having Slider Device and Tamper-Evident Structure". The complete disclosure of application 60/179,031 is incorporated by reference herein.

Field of the Disclosure

10 This disclosure concerns reclosable packages. In particular, this disclosure describes packages having slider devices for opening and closing the packages, and also having tamper-evident structures.

Background

15 Flexible packages, in particular resealable and recloseable packages, are frequently used for packaging of consumable goods. Goods that are not used completely when the package is initially opened rely on a zipper closure to reclose the package and keep the remaining contents fresh. Examples of consumable goods that are often packaged in packages, such as bags, with a zipper closure include potting soil, fertilizer, pet food, dog biscuits, vegetables, cereal, and many different foods edible by
20 humans.

 Often, the opening and closing of the zipper closure is facilitated by a slider device that is mounted on the zipper closure. The slider device is constructed to pry apart the interlocking zipper closure members when the slider device is moved in a first direction along the zipper, and to engage the interlocking zipper closure members when
25 the slider device is moved in a second, opposite direction along the zipper. For some applications, a tamper-evident structure, to notify whether access has been gained to the zipper closure, is desired.

One example of a tamper-evident structure is disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,669,715 to Dobreski et al. This tamper-evident structure is provided by an extension of the zipper closure member flanges above the level of the slider device. A portion of the zipper closure flanges extends above the level of the slider device, thus not allowing
5 movement of the slider device. To move the slider device and gain access to the package interior, the tamper-evident structure is removed from the top of the zipper closure. In some instances, the resulting top surface of the zipper closure can be rough, ragged, and otherwise have an imperfect surface. Such an imperfect surface can cause problems when moving the slider device along the zipper closure.

10 Improvements in these types of packages are desirable.

Brief Description of the Drawings

FIG. 1 is a front plan view of a first embodiment of a flexible, reclosable package having a slider device and a tamper-evident structure;

15 FIG. 2 is a cross-sectional view of the flexible, reclosable package taken along line 2-2 of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a cross-sectional view of a second embodiment of a flexible, reclosable package analogous to the view taken along line 2-2 of FIG. 1; and

FIG. 4 is a front plan view of the flexible, reclosable package of FIGS. 1 and 2 with the tamper-evident structure removed.

Summary of the Disclosure

20 The present disclosure relates to a flexible bag, having a resealable, reclosable zipper closure mechanism, opening and closing of which is accomplished by a slider device. The slider device is constructed and arranged for mounting on the closure construction and for interlocking and disengaging the first closure profile with
25 the second closure profile. When the slider device is moved in a first direction, the first closure profile is engaged to the second closure profile; when the slider device is moved in a second opposite direction, the first closure profile is disengaged from the second closure profile. A tamper-evident seal is provided on the exterior of the zipper closure

so as to provide evidence whether access has been gained to the interior of the package. Additionally, an internal tamper-evident structure, such as a second tamper-evident structure or a peel seal can be included in the package.

In particular, the disclosure is directed to a flexible, reclosable package comprising first and second panel sections secured together and defining an interior. A zipper closure is sealed to each of first and second panel sections along a top edge of the package and extends from a first side edge to a second side edge. The zipper closure has first and second mating profiles. A slider device, constructed and arranged for mounting on the zipper closure and for interlocking the first mating profile with the second mating profile when the slider device is moved in a first direction and for disengaging the first mating profile from the second mating profile when the slider device is moved in a second opposite direction, is operably mounted on the zipper closure. A tamper-evident structure encases at least a portion of the zipper closure and extends from the second side edge to an abutment positioned between the slider device and the second side edge.

Methods of making such a package, and methods of using such a package, are also disclosed.

Detailed Description

The addition of a slider device to a flexible package, such as a bag, is advantageous to aging or arthritic persons not having the physical ability to use just a zipper closure to reseal a bag. Additionally, the addition of a slider device to a flexible package facilitates the use of the bag by users of all ages and abilities. The presence of an external tamper-evident structure provides assurance that undesired access has not been gained to the interior and contents of the package.

A flexible, reclosable package 10 is shown in FIGS. 1 and 2. Package 10 includes four edges, a first side edge 13, a bottom edge 15, a second side edge 17, and a top edge 19. Providing the structure of package 10 are polymeric film side panels 12 and 14 (FIG. 2), which, with edges 13, 15, 17, define an interior 11, as best seen in FIG. 2.

Side panels 12, 14 are connected to each other at each of side edges 13, 17, bottom edge 15, and top edge 19. In FIG. 1, side edges 13, 17 are seals created by the application of heat and pressure to side panels 12, 14. As best seen in FIG. 2, bottom edge 15 is a fold line between side panels 12, 14, which is formed when a single sheet of film is folded to form the two side panels. In some embodiments, bottom edge 15 can be a seal created by the application of heat and pressure to side panels 12, 14.

A zipper closure arrangement 20 (shown partially in phantom in FIG. 1) having mating closure profiles to open and close (unseal and reseal) the package 10 extends from first side edge 13 to second side edge 17 close to top edge 19 of package 10, as seen in FIG. 1. The zipper closure 20 can include a variety of configurations and structures. Zipper closure 20 can be configured in any known manner, for example, such as disclosed in U.S. Patent Nos. 4,240,241; 4,246,288; and 4,437,293; each of which is incorporated by reference herein. In FIG. 2, zipper closure 20 is illustrated with mating closure profiles such as a first mating profile 22 and a second mating profile 24. First mating profile 22 and second mating profile 24 engage and disengage, as appropriate, to open and close package 10. Still referring to FIG. 2, first and second mating profiles 22, 24 of zipper closure 20 are attached to the inside of side panels 12, 14, respectively, by sealing flanges 26, 28, respectively.

A slider device 30 is mounted on zipper closure 20 to facilitate opening and closing of zipper closure 20. Slider devices and how they function to open and close zipper closures, in general, are taught, for example, in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,063,644; 5,301,394; 5,442,837, and 5,664,229, each of which is incorporated by reference herein. A preferred slider device is taught in U.S. patent applications 09/365,215 and 29/108,657, both filed July 30, 1999 and incorporated herein by reference in their entirety. Although shown schematically in FIGS. 1 through 4, slider device 30 is preferably constructed and arranged in accordance with the disclosures of the patent applications 09/365,215 and 29/108,657.

Two portions of zipper closure 20, one close to first side edge 13 and another close to second side edge 17, act as slider stop areas; these slider stop areas are preferably crushed, such as by ultrasonic crushing, shown at crush areas 23, 27 in FIG.

1. These slider stop areas or crush areas securely seal first and second mating profiles 22, 24 together to minimize the chance of slider device 30 sliding off the side edges 13, 17 of package 10. The slider stop areas or crush areas further minimize the tendency for slider device 30 to abut against either of first side edge 13 or second side edge 17.

5 A notch (not shown) is preferably disposed within zipper closure 20. The notch is designed to provide a "park place" into which slider device 30 settles when zipper closure 20 is sealed. Such a notch may decrease any tendency for an incomplete interlock between first mating profile 22 and second mating profile 24. Examples of notches are disclosed, for example, in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,067,208 and 5,301,395, each
10 of which is incorporated by reference herein.

 In FIGS. 1 and 2, package 10 includes a tamper-evident structure 35 disposed at top edge 19 to retain slider device 30 close to first side edge 13 and preferably, within any notch. By "tamper-evident", it is meant that it provides an indication to the consumer as to whether the package 10 has been previously opened. In
15 order to access the interior 11 (FIG. 2) of package 10, the tamper-evident structure 35 needs to be penetrated. In the embodiment depicted in FIGS. 1 and 2, tamper-evident structure 35 covers and forms a complete enclosure around the majority of zipper closure 20 while leaving slider device 30 exposed. As best seen in FIG. 2, tamper-evident structure 35 extends from below zipper closure 20 and encases and surrounds
20 first and second mating profiles 22, 24. In particular, tamper-evident structure 35 extends from second side edge 17 (FIG. 1) along top edge 19 toward first side edge 13, and ends at abutment 33. Tamper evident-structure 35 extends at least 50% of the distance from second side edge 17 to first side edge 13, typically at least 75%. In preferred embodiments, tamper evident-structure 35 extends at least 80%, and more
25 preferably at least 90% of the distance between second side edge to first side edge 13. It is desired that the amount of zipper closure 20 not covered by tamper evident-structure 35 is minimized; thus, it is preferred that tamper evident-structure 35 extends to, and terminates at, abutment 33 prior to reaching slider device 30. Tamper-evident structure 35 does not encase slider device 30; in the embodiment shown in FIG. 1, no portion of
30 tamper evident-structure 35 extends over, above, or otherwise covers slider device 30.

In one embodiment, the distance between abutment 33 and slider device 30 is no greater than about 2 cm. In another embodiment, this distance is no less than about 0.5 mm. Typically, the distance between abutment 33 and slider device 30 is about 1 mm to 1 cm, and preferably is about 2 mm to 5 mm (0.5 cm).

5 Tamper-evident structure 35 is formed by sealing the tops of side panels 12, 14 over zipper closure 20 at top edge 19, as best seen in FIG. 2. Preferably, the seal along top edge 19 of tamper-evident structure 35 is continuous; that is, with no unsealed lengths between side panels 12, 14 along top edge 19. However, in some embodiments spot sealing along top edge 19 may be acceptable. Additionally, in some instances the
10 seal may rip or tear, leaving small lengths of unsealed top edge 19. Each end of tamper-evident structure 35, that is, at second side edge 17 and at abutment 33, is also preferably continuously sealed.

 Abutment 33 extends approximately perpendicular to zipper closure 20. Abutment 33 can be made by ultrasonic welding, crushing, thermally sealing, or by
15 using mechanical attachments or chemical adhesives. It is not necessary that the entire length of abutment 33, that is, from zipper closure 20 to top edge 19, is continuously sealed.

 In order to gain access to the package interior 11, slider device 30 must be moved along zipper closure 20, which can only be done if tamper-evident structure 35
20 has been penetrated; typically tamper-evident structure 35 has to be removed. Tamper-evident structure 35 includes an area of weakness 38, which allows for easy removal of tamper-evident structure 35. In some package embodiments, area of weakness 38 is a perforation line, tear-strip, zip strip, laser score, or any type of weakened area that
25 allows for easy removal of tamper-evident structure 35 to expose zipper closure 20 so that slider device 30 can be moved. Area of weakness 38 extends along the length of tamper evident-structure 35 and is positioned below zipper closure 20, so that there is no interference as slider device 30 is moved along zipper closure 20.

 When tamper-evident structure 35 is present over zipper closure 20, the true top edge 29 of package 10 is encased within tamper-evident structure 35. Typically, the
30 top edge 29 is defined by first and second mating profiles 22, 24. When tamper-evident

structure 35 has been removed at area of weakness 38, the true top edge 29 is exposed and is the top most portion of package 10, not including slider device 30. There are no further film sections or other structures that extend above top edge 29.

FIG. 4 shows package 10 with tamper-evident structure 35 removed from
5 over zipper closure 20. Top edge 29 is exposed and slider device 30 can be easily moved from first crush area 23 at first side edge 13 along zipper closure 20 to second crush area 27 at second side edge 17 to open zipper closure 20 and gain access to interior 11. Panel edge 40 is exposed where area of weakness 38 used to be. Note that
10 when the tamper-evident structure 35 is removed, there is no significant amount of tamper-evident structure remaining above where area of weakness 38 used to be. There is no material left that may make physical contact with slider device 30 or might otherwise impair movement of slider device 30 along zipper closure 20.

FIG. 3 illustrates a second embodiment of a package 10', similar to package 10 of FIGS. 1 and 2, except that a second tamper-evident structure is included. As
15 illustrated in FIG. 3, a second tamper-evident structure 36 can be positioned between side panels 12, 14; this provides a second barrier that needs to be broken in order to gain access to interior 11 of package 10'. Generally, this second tamper-evident structure 36 is considered an internal tamper-evident structure, because it is positioned between zipper closure 20 and interior 11. Second tamper-evident structure 36, as shown in FIG.
20 3, is a web of material, preferably polymeric film, extending between sealing flanges 26, 28 of first and second mating profiles 22, 24 along the length of zipper closure 20. Penetration of this second tamper-evident structure 36 can be accomplished by using a perforation line, a tear bead, zip strip, or the like.

Alternately or additionally, a peel seal can be positioned between side panels
25 12, 14 or sealing flanges 26, 28 of zipper closure 20 to provide a hermetic barrier for the interior 11. A peel seal can be resealable; that is, it can be opened and resealed multiple times. Alternately, a peel seal can be a single use seal, which, once broken, cannot be resealed. Examples of peel seals are disclosed, for example, in U.S. Patent Nos. 4,925,316 and 5,893,645, each of which is incorporated by reference herein.

Package 10, and package 10', can be manufactured by techniques generally known in the art of packaging. In one embodiment, side panels 12, 14 may be formed by a single sheet or web of material that has been folded to form bottom edge 15, or two sheets of material can be sealed at bottom edge 15 to form package 10, 10'. Zipper closure 20 is brought between side panels 12, 14 and sealing flanges 26, 28 (FIG. 2) of zipper closure 20 are sealed to the inside surface of side panels 12, 14. In some embodiments, for example to manufacture package 10' of FIG. 3, zipper closure 20 may have second tamper-evident structure 36 (FIG. 3) incorporated within.

A topmost portion of each of side panels 12, 14 is brought over to encase zipper closure 20 and slider device 30. By the term "topmost", it is meant the portions of side panels 12, 14 not defining interior 11 (FIG. 2); in another aspect, "topmost" is meant to refer to the portions of side panels 12, 14 that form tamper-evident structure 35. The topmost portions of side panels 12, 14 are sealed at top edge 19 (FIG. 2) and tamper-evident structure 35 is formed. Opening 33 can be provided in the topmost portions of side panels 12, 14 before or after the side panels are sealed to form tamper-evident structure 35. Opening 33 can be formed by die cutting, slitting, laser cutting, or by any such method.

Side edges 13, 17 are made typically by thermally sealing, and optionally cutting, side panels 12, 14 and zipper closure 20. These side edges 13, 17 can be made before or after tamper-evident structure 35 is made.

To open the bag construction of FIGS. 1 and 2, and of FIG. 3, first tamper-evident structure 35 is removed by tearing along the area of weakness 38, providing access to the zipper closure 20 and slider device 30. This leaves a structure as shown in FIG. 4. The slider device 30 may then be moved from its position at first side edge 13 (FIG. 1) along zipper closure 20 to second side edge 17 (FIG. 1); movement of slider device 30 along zipper closure 20 unmates first and second mating profiles 22, 24 (FIGS. 2 and 3) and provides access to interior 11 (FIG. 2). For packages such as package 10' of FIG. 3, second tamper-evident structure 36 must be breached prior to accessing interior 11.

